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Haiphong Raids: McCain Triumph

THE BOMBING of the fuel dumps and truck-tank parks in the Haiphong area was a personal triumph for salty old Adm. John McCain, the Pacific commander, who has tried for the past three years to sell President Nixon on hitting Haiphong harbor.

Even before Nixon entered the White House, his foreign policy adviser, Henry Kissinger, fired off a series of terse questions about Vietnam to all appropriate government agencies. He summarized the results in his first National Security Study Memoranda, which is known inside the White House as NSSM-1.

At McCain's prodding, the Joint Chiefs advocated strikes against the Haiphong port complex, where most of the enemy's war goods arrive. They also wanted to sow the harbor with mines to keep ships from delivering military cargo.

The Central Intelligence Agency, however, cautioned against bombing the harbor. Not only was there danger of damaging Soviet shipping and precipitating a confrontation with Russia, the CIA argued, but anyway the bombing wouldn't stop the infiltration of supplies into South Vietnam.

Later, McCain, a pugnacious sea dog, pressed his arguments personally upon the President in Honolulu in April, 1970, and again the following month at San Clemente, Calif.

Afterward, he complained in a secret message to the Joint Chiefs that "the old man," meaning Nixon, hadn't been "responsive." McCain was more pleased with Kissinger's attitude, which the admiral found "reasonable."

Nevertheless, contingency plans for air attacks upon North Vietnam, including the bombing and mining of Haiphong harbor, were up-dated. These were prepared in Saigon and forwarded to Honolulu by Gen. Creighton Abrams, the American commander in Vietnam.

McCain transmitted the plans, with his hearty endorsement, to the Pentagon on Oct. 17, 1970. But not until the North Vietnamese Army stormed across the demilitarized zone into South Vietnam did the President activate the plans.

The Washington Special Action Group, the emergency team that operates under Kissinger, reviewed the contingency plans for bombing various targets in North Vietnam. The secret intelligence reports indicated that Haiphong's air defenses were rusty and could be penetrated.

The CIA still opposed the bombing as not worth the risk, but the Joint Chiefs contended that Hanoi had changed the complexion of the war. The conventional forces that had been thrown into the invasion, argued the Joint Chiefs, were dependent upon the supplies that could be destroyed at Haiphong.

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, skeptical, was inclined to agree with the CIA. He pointed out that the invasion equipment had been moved to the front in advance of the attack; therefore, he doubted that the Hanoi-Haiphong air strikes would blunt the offensive at least for several months.

The President, however, was persuaded by Kissinger, and the green light was flashed. The latest targeting information was fed into the operation, which was known by the secret code name "Freedom Porch Bravo."

Intelligence reports claim that, inside the Kremlin, Soviet hawks and doves are still debating whether the Hanoi-Haiphong bombing was such an affront that the invitation to President Nixon to visit Moscow should be revoked.

But in Honolulu, Admiral McCain has been seen grinning happily.

Reds in South

AT THE VERY time when the Saigon government is least able to do anything about it, there are definite cracks showing up in the Communist Party structure in South Vietnam.

The Communists count on youths to fill up the gaps in party membership caused by battle casualties and the U.S.-Saigon "Operation Phoenix" assassination drive.

But documents captured in the field affirm that even as in America, the Vietcong youth are sickening of the war.

This is precisely the kind of deterioration that the United States has hoped would occur in Vietnam.

But the North Vietnamese invasion has once again given the Vietcong a fillup for getting their shaky infrastructure in order.